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# TWO COLLEGE ESSAYS

BY L. B. R. BRIGGS

# HABIT

BY WILLIAM JAMES

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge

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WILLIAM JAMES

A PART OF THE CHAPTER ON HABIT

FROM "PRINCIPLES OF PSYCHOLOGY"

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R.M.B. 26 Jan. 2

# FOREWORD

When a Senior looks back over his college course, it is often with a two-fold sense of regret. He has left undone many things he wishes he had done, and done many things he would gladly see undone. He realizes that the irrevocable opportunities have been wasted, or only partly used. Perhaps the loafer's self-justifying argument, that meeting men is after all the great opportunity of college, has deluded him into forgetting that it is only one of many opportunities. Beyond all this he remembers that the temptations incident to the young man's new-found freedom were not always resisted.

And the Senior thinks that if the Freshman had only had his wisdom, the story would have been very different; and so it would have been, for in the last

analysis all shortcomings are due to a lack of appreciation of relative values.

No amount of good advice can give to the Freshman the Senior's wisdom. Experience is the great teacher. Nevertheless, boys who think can still learn much from precept and more from example, and this consideration has seemed to justify the compilation of this pamphlet. It has been printed for private distribution at the instance of a few college graduates,[1] who want to send to young men just going to college what they believe to be a useful and an inspiring message.

And it is further hoped that the pamphlet may prove valuable to parents; bringing home to them anew the importance of those functions that cannot possibly be delegated, and of that mutual understanding which proves such a bulwark to their sons in time of stress.

This little volume was first printed in

[1] Information concerning this pamphlet can be obtained by communicating with R. B. Cutting, 32 Nassau St., New York.

1909, though the contents have undergone a slight change.

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New York, *May, 1912.*

FROM
SCHOOL, COLLEGE AND
CHARACTER

# SCHOOL, COLLEGE, AND CHARACTER

## I

### FATHERS, MOTHERS, AND FRESHMEN

BY virtue of the authority committed to me," says President Eliot on Commencement Day, "I confer on you the first degree in Arts; and to each of you I give a diploma which admits you, as youth of promise, to the fellowship of educated men." The college sends her alumni into the world with nothing more than a warrant that they are presentable intellectually. Yet her unwritten and unspoken purpose is not so much intellectual as moral; and her strongest hope is to stamp her graduates with an abiding character. A college stands for learning, for culture, and for power; in particular, it stands for the

recognition of an aim higher than money-getting. It is a place where our young men shall see visions; where even the idlest and lowest man of all must catch glimpses of ideals which, if he could see them steadily, would transfigure life. The Bachelor of Arts is seldom, on his Commencement Day, a scholar either polished or profound; but he may be in the full sense of the word a man.

Though the responsibility of the Alma Mater for the manhood of her sons gets little formal recognition, whoever loves her feels it none the less, and knows that her good name depends not so much on her children's contributions to learning as on their courtesy, their efficiency, their integrity, and their courage. The college herself, as represented by her governing bodies, feels this deeply, in a general way, but does not know and cannot find out how far her responsibility reaches into details. Intellectual discipline she professes and must provide, — subjects of

study old and new; instructors that know their subjects and can teach them: and she is happy if she has money enough to make these things sure. Thus beyond what is spent for the chapel and for the maintenance of decent order in the premises there can be little visible outlay for the protection and the development of a student's character. Nor can the formation of character, except as affected by courses in ethics, be measured out and paid for by the hour or by the job; and thus the college can do little more than trust in the awakening of intellectual interests to drive out the trivial and the base, in the often unconscious influence of men of character among its Faculty, and in the habits and standards of conduct already acquired at school and at home. Now and then a college teacher rejects all responsibility outside of the classroom. "My business," he says, "is to teach *men:* if the students are not men, I don't want them in my classes;

if they don't care to learn, let them go their own way. What becomes of them is no business of mine; and if they have to leave college, so much the better for the college and for them. The first, last, and only duty of a teacher in a university is to advance the knowledge of his subject; he is false to his trust, if he spends time and strength in patching up worthless boys who have no place in an institution of learning."

This doctrine, seldom enunciated by men that have sons and happily never lived down to, is the natural refuge of professors who see the opposition between the advancement of learning and concern for their pupils' character, and who, with the enthusiasm of the investigator and the teacher, have time and strength for nothing more. Nor is the professor the only interested person that would shift the responsibility. Those parents who have turned their children over successively to the governess, the little boys'

school, and the big boys' school, turn them over in time to the college. The college, they admit, has its dangers; yet it is the only thing for a gentleman's sons at a certain time in their lives, and the risk must be taken. The business of the college they patronize is, like the business of the schools they have patronized, to develop, cultivate, and protect their sons, whom, to put it in their own language, they "confide" to the college for that purpose. "I sent my boy to college," writes the mother of a lazy little Freshman that has come to grief, "and I supposed he would be looked out for." "Write me a good long letter about my Darling," says another. "I want my boy to be up *and washed* at eight," says a careful father. "Please send me every week an exact record of my son's absences," a suspicious father writes to the dean, — and the dean wonders what would become of himself, his stenographer, and his ostensible duties

if all parents should ask for consideration on this same scale.

"Some things are of that nature as to make
One's fancy chuckle, while his heart doth ache;"

and often such appeals as I have cited, though superficially amusing, belong to the sad phenomena of the college world; for they imply parental distrust at the very time when a youth, just entering the larger life and the fiercer temptations of early manhood, needs, beyond all other human helps, a relation with father and mother of long-tried and perfect trust. They imply, also, parents' ignorance of children's character.

To the dean of a large college, who has most to do with students and their parents in all academic sorrows, it soon becomes clear that parents are accountable for more undergraduate shortcomings than they or their sons suspect, — and this after liberal allowance for faults in the college and its officers. "I have

spent an hour to-day with Jones's father," said a college president in a formidable case of discipline. "I have conceived a better opinion of the son after meeting the father," — and the experience is repeated year by year. Five minutes, or two minutes, with a father or a mother may reveal the chief secret of a young man's failure or misconduct, and may fill the heart of an administrative officer with infinite compassion. "You say he gambles," says a loud, swaggering father. "Well, what of it? Gentlemen always play cards." "I told my boy," says a father of a different stamp, "that I did not myself believe in [what is commonly called "vice"]; but that if he went into that sort of thing, he must not go off with the crowd, but must do it quietly in a gentlemanly way."

Hereditary and home influence less palpable, but quite as pervasive and nearly as demoralizing, is that of the trivially biographic mother, who, while a dozen

men are waiting at the dean's office door, assures the dean that her son, now on trial for his academic life, "was a lovely baby," and who, so to speak, grows up with him then and there, tracking him step by step, with frequent countermarches, to his present station; or of the mother who insinuates that the father (whose ambassador she is) has been less competent and wise than she, and that her son gets from the father's family offensive traits which she hopes will be kept under by the sterling merits that he gets from her own; or of the father who is tickled by the reminiscences of his own youth that are evoked when his son is caught stealing a poor shopkeeper's sign; or of the father who suggests that the college should employ at his expense a detective against his son; or of the father who, when his son is suspended from the university, keeps him in a neighboring city, at any cost and with any risk and with any amount of

prevarication, rather than take him home and let the neighbors suspect the truth; or of the father who at a crucial moment in the life of a wayward son goes to Europe for pleasure (though, to do him justice, he has been of little use at home); or of the father who argues that his son's love of drink cannot be hereditary, since he himself had straightened out before his son was born.

The best safeguard of a young man in college — better even than being in love with the right kind of girl — is a perfectly open and affectionate relation to both parents, or to the one parent or guardian that represents both. In saying this, I presuppose parents and guardians of decent character, and capable of open and affectionate relations. One of the surprises in administrative life at college is the underhand dealing of parents, not merely with college officers, but with their own sons. "Your son's case is just where I cannot tell whether or no it will

be wise to put him on probation," says the dean to a well-educated and agreeable father. "It will do him good," says the father emphatically. "Then," says the dean, "we will put him on;" and the father, as he takes his leave, observes, "I shall give him to understand that it was inevitable, — that *I* did all *I* could to prevent it." Now and then a father writes to the dean for an opinion of a son's work and character. The dean would like to tell the son of the inquiry and to show him the answer before sending it, so that everything, favorable or unfavorable, may be aboveboard; but he has, or thinks he has, the father's confidence to keep. Accordingly he says nothing to the student concerned, answers the father straightforwardly, and learns later that his letter, if unfavorable, has passed from the father to the son without comment, as if it had been a gratuitous emanation from the dean's office. The letter may be garbled. In answer to the

inquiry of a distinguished man about his ward, the dean of a college made clear, first, that the young man had been in danger of losing his degree, and next that the danger was probably over. The distinguished man had the unfavorable part of the letter copied, omitted the favorable, and sent the partial copy to the student. He omitted the dean's signature: but the letter itself showed whence it came; and it appeared to have been written just after the dean had assured the student of his belief that the degree was safe. The young man was frank enough and sensible enough in his perplexity to go straight to the dean; but the false position of the distinguished man and the false position in which (to some degree unwittingly) he would have left the dean before the student are clear. It is absolutely essential to successful college government that executive officers should be square rather than "politic," and should be outspoken, so far as

they can be without breaking anybody's confidence. At best, it is scarcely possible to make the younger students see that the main purpose of a disciplinary officer is not the detection of wrongdoers, by fair means or by foul; and it is quite impossible for such an officer to be above suspicion in the eyes of students while parents assume that he is either a partner or a rival in disingenuous dealing.

Sometimes father and son combine to keep a mother in ignorance; and frequently that great principle of parental relation — that father or mother will forgive all and will love in spite of all, but will be most deeply wounded unless trusted — is not recognized by one parent toward another, or by the son toward either. In cases of almost total want of previous acquaintance, cases of parents who complain of vacation at boarding-school because it leaves their children on their hands, this is not to be wondered at; but in the everyday father, willing

to give his children the best of all he has, a profound ignorance of his son's acts, motives, and character must be rooted in some deep mistake, not of heart, but of judgment. That such ignorance exists is plain: it attributes truth to the tricky, sobriety to the vinous, and chastity to the wanton. Its existence is further confirmed by the attitude of these misapprehended sons when no argument can persuade them to be the first messengers, to father or mother, of their own transgression. "Your father must know this from me; but he has a right to know it first from you. You say you cannot give him pain; but nothing will help him so much in bearing the pain that must be his as the knowledge that you yourself can tell him all. Before I write to him or see him, I will give you time; and I beg you to tell him: you cannot help him more now than by going to him, or hurt him more than by avoiding him. This I know if I know anything: it is

not mere theory; it is based on what I have seen of many fathers and of many sons." Yet often the student, especially the young student, still keeps clear of his father as long as he can.

This want of filial courage at critical moments must be accounted for by a false reticence in those early years in which affectionate freedom between father or mother and son must begin. Unhappily it is fostered by literature. Even Thackeray, whose total influence is honest and clean, seems, when he writes of college life, to have in mind such general propositions as that young men always run into debt and seldom make all their debts known at home; that all normal young men live more or less wantonly; that only girls (whose intellects are seldom strong) are pure in heart and life, and that their purity is a kind of innocence born of blindness and of shelter from the world; that no mother knows the morbid unrest which

is stirring in her sweet-faced little boy. Pendennis, Philip, the Poems — all furnish marked instances of Thackeray's attitude toward the exuberant folly and sin of young men; and his notion of a man's standard in things moral is revealed by his remark that "no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a man," since the author of Tom Jones.

Thackeray is only too near the truth. The earliest important cause of reticence between parent and child, the longest continued, the fiercest, and the most morbidly silent temptation, the temptation most likely to scorch and blight a whole life and the lives of those who come after, the temptation most likely to lead through passion to reckless selfishness, and through shame to reckless lying, is the manifold temptation in the mysterious relation of sex to sex. No subject needs, for the health of our sons and for the protection of our daughters,

to be brought earlier out of the region of alluring and forbidden exploration into the light of wholesome truth — out of the category of the unspeakable into the category of things which, though talked of seldom, may be talked of freely between father or mother and son. Temptation, passion, will exist always; but temptation and passion which must be nursed or suppressed in secret are far more insidious, far less conquerable. Moreover, temptation and passion, when confided to a father or a mother by a son who is struggling to do right, lose half their danger: the strength of those nearest and dearest buoys up our own; and the fear of confessing a sin — a false fear when once the sin is committed — may be wholesome as a safeguard. No parent can begin to be in a frank relation to his son if he has left that son to pick up in the street and in the newspaper all his knowledge of the laws to which he owes his life; yet, as things stand, this

most vital of all subjects is often the one subject about which a young man shrinks from talking with any but contemporaries as ignorant as himself, a subject kept in the dark, except for coarse jokes at the theatre or at convivial gatherings of boys and men.

Almost equally important with an understanding between parent and son is an understanding between every student and at least one college officer. There must be some one on the spot to whom the student may talk freely and fully about such perplexities as beset every young man in a new life away from home. Even a college-bred father is college-bred in another generation, and cannot know those local and temporal characteristics of a college on the mastery of which depends so large a measure of the student's happiness. Besides, a father may not be promptly accessible, whereas every good college has at hand many officers whose best satisfaction lies

in giving freely of their time and strength to less experienced men that trust them. Some confidences, no doubt, a college officer cannot accept; but even in a case of grave wrongdoing, if the relation between him and the student is on both sides clearly understood, a full confession, the only honorable course, is usually, in the long run, the only prudent course also. At Harvard College the relation between a Freshman and his "adviser" is much what the Freshman makes it; for the adviser feels an older man's diffidence about forcing his friendship on defenceless youth: but it may be made of high and permanent value. So may the relation between a student and any worthy college teacher whom the student, because he has seen in him something to inspire confidence, has chosen for a counsellor. Here, too, a father intimate with his son may help him to overcome shyness, and to make use of that disinterested friendship of older men

which is one of the best opportunities of college life and is often thrown away.

By fostering these friendships and influences, by interesting himself in every detail of a son's career, a father may do much. A mother may often do more, by establishing her son in the friendship of good women. This is partly a matter of social influence, no doubt; a poor and ignorant woman a thousand miles away may not see how she can effect it; may shrink from an appeal to the unknown wives of unknown professors for friendly greetings to her boy: but many women whose sons are sent to a college town know, or have friends that know, or have friends who have friends that know, good women there. The friendship of good women is, as everybody knows, the sweetest and most wholesome corrective of loneliness and of wandering desires. A boy of seventeen or eighteen, far from home for the first time, fresh from the society of mother

and sisters and girl friends, may be terribly lonely. Near any college he will find a number of foolish girls, easy of acquaintance, proud to know a student, and not fastidious about conventionalities; girls not vicious as yet, but on the unseen road to vice; girls whom he could not comfortably introduce to his mother and sisters, but who, *merely as girls*, are of interest to him in the absence of social and intellectual equals. The peril of such friendships is as commonplace as truth and as undying: reckless giddiness on one side, reckless selfishness half disguised by better names on the other, the excitement of things known to be not quite proper but not clearly recognized as wrong, have led to one kind of misery or another, so long as men have been men and women women. Yet these sorrows, toward which men move at first with no semblance of passion, but with mere lonely curiosity, may be forestalled. Counsel of parents, too seldom given in

such matters, will do much; access to home life, to the friendship of motherly mothers and of modest, sensible daughters, will do more. Shy and awkward a Freshman may be, and ridiculously afraid of speaking with women: yet the shyer and the more awkward he is, the lonelier he is — the more in need of seeing the inside of a house and of a home; the more likely to remember, as what made his first college year supportable, some few days in which a good woman who used to know his mother has opened her doors to him as to a human being and a friend.

After all, the most searching test of a parent's relation to his son in college is the son's own view of the purpose of his college life. As I have said elsewhere, "Many parents regard college as far less serious in its demands than school or business, as a place of delightful irresponsibility, a sort of four years' breathing-space wherein a youth may at once cul-

tivate and disport himself before he is condemned for life to hard labor." They "like to see young people have a good time;" a little evasion, a little law-breaking, and a handful of wild oats mark in their minds the youth of spirit. They distinguish between outwitting the authorities, whom they still regard as impersonal or hostile, and outwitting other less disinterested friends. "Boys will be boys" is a cover, not merely for the thoughtless exuberance of lively young animals, but for selfishness, trickiness, cruelty, and even vice. I wonder at the rashness with which respectable men talk of wild oats as a normal and on the whole an attractive attribute of youth; for the wild oats theory of a young man's life, when seen without its glamour, may mean awful physical peril, disingenuous relations with father and mother, dishonor to some girl, as yet perhaps unknown, who is going to be his wife. Yet parents, whether by precept or by

example or by mere personal ineffectiveness or by dulness and neglect, encourage that very disingenuousness which is exercised against themselves. Those who have seen the unhappiness that such disingenuousness brings can never forget it. I have been begged by undergraduates to keep students out of a great Boston gambling-house, long since closed. In that gambling-house as Freshmen they had become bankrupt; and for months — almost for years — they had shifted and lied to keep their bankruptcy unknown at home. The crash of discovery had come, as it always comes; the air had cleared; and as Seniors they were unwilling to leave college without at least an attempt to save other Freshmen from doing and from suffering what they had done and suffered. I have seen sons before the crash, and I have seen parents after it.

How much that is objectionable in college life is the result of injudicious

money allowances (whether princely or niggardly), I have never determined. Some students use large incomes as wisely as their elders and more generously; some pay the entire college expenses of fellow students in need: others, no doubt, have more money than is good for them; but it is hard to pick out that part of their moral and academic disaster for which wealth is responsible.

I may mention here that two-edged argument so often urged by a father when his son is to be dismissed from college: "If you don't keep him here, what *shall* I do with him? He is n't fit for anything else; he would do nothing in a profession or in business." I cannot say with some that it is no concern of the college what is done with him; for a college, as I conceive it, has some interest in the future of every boy that has darkened its doors: but I can say that a youth confessedly fit for nothing else is not often good timber for an alumnus.

A college is not a home for incurables or a limbo for the dull and inefficient. Moreover, as a Western father observed, "It does not pay to spend two thousand dollars on a two-dollar boy." Though a firm believer in college training as the supreme intellectual privilege of youth, I am convinced that the salvation of some young men (for the practical purposes of this present world) is in taking them out of college and giving them long and inevitable hours in some office or factory. I do not mean that all success in college belongs to the good scholars; for many a youth who stands low in his classes gets incalculable benefit from his college course. He may miss that important part of training which consists in his doing the thing for which he is booked; but he does something for which — through a natural mistake, if it is a mistake — he thinks he is booked: he leads an active life, of subordination here, of leadership there, of responsibility

everywhere; and he leads it in a community where learning and culture abound, where ideals are noble, and where courage and truth are rated high. Such a young man, if he barely scrapes through (provided he scrapes through honestly), has wasted neither his father's money nor his own time. Even the desultory reader who contracts, at the expense of his studies, what has been called "the library habit," may become the glory of his Alma Mater. It is the weak-kneed dawdler who ought to go, the youth whose body and mind are wasting away in bad hours and bad company, and whose sense of truth grows dimmer and dimmer in the smoke of his cigarettes; yet it is precisely this youth who, through mere inertia, is hardest to move, who seems glued to the university, whose father is helpless before his future, and whose relatives contend that, since he is no man's enemy but his own, he should be allowed to stay in college so long as

his father will pay his tuition fee, — as if a college were a public conveyance wherein anybody that pays his fare may abide "unless personally obnoxious," or a hotel where anybody that pays enough may lie in bed and have all the good things sent up to him. No college — certainly no college with an elective system, which presupposes a youth's interest in his own intellectual welfare — can afford to keep such as he. Nor can he afford to be kept. One of the first aims of college life is increase of power: be he scholar or athlete, the sound undergraduate learns to meet difficulties; "stumbling-blocks," in the words of an admirable preacher, "become stepping-stones." It is a short-sighted kindness that keeps in college (with its priceless opportunities for growth and its corresponding opportunities for degeneration) a youth who lies down in front of his stumbling-blocks in the vague hope that by and by the authorities will have them carted away.

The only substitute for the power that surmounts obstacles is the enthusiasm before which obstacles disappear; and sometimes a student who has never got hold of his work finds on a sudden that it has got hold of him. Here, I admit, is the loafer's argument (or, rather, the loafer's father's argument) for the loafer's continuance at a seat of learning. In any loafer may lurk the latent enthusiast: no man's offering is so hopelessly non-combustible that it never can be touched by the fire from heaven; and few places are more exposed to the sparks than our best colleges. Some new study (chosen, it may be, as a "snap"), some magnetic teacher, some classmate's sister, may, in the twinkling of an eye, create and establish an object in a hitherto aimless life, and an enthusiasm which makes light of work, — just as the call to arms has transmuted many an idler into a man. Some idlers whose regeneration is less sudden are idlers at college chiefly be-

cause they have yet to adjust themselves to an elective system, have yet to find their niche in the intellectual life. Talking with a famous professor some years ago about his wish to lower the requirements for admission to college, I expressed the fear that, with lowered requirements, would come a throng of idlers. "That," said he, with a paradoxical wisdom for which I am not yet ripe, but which I have at last begun to understand, "That is precisely what I should like to see. I should like to see an increase in the number of these idle persons; for here are set before them higher ideals than are set before them elsewhere." "People talk of evil in college," says a graduate with business experience in New York. "I tell you, college is a place of white purity when compared with the New York business world." In the withdrawal of the veriest idler from the hope of the vision lies a chance of injury; and this chance, small

as it is, may fill the horizon of father or mother. "Dismissal from college means certain ruin." Hence these tears of strong men, these "fits of the asterisks" in undisciplined women. Hence those variations in the father who first proclaims that his son must stand near the head of his class or go; next, when that son has fallen short of the least that the college demands, drags out every argument good or bad for keeping him till the end,—and at last almost leaps for joy if he is warranted auction-sound on Commencement Day. Recognition of the possible disaster in withdrawal may be blended, in a parent's mind, with desire to avoid personal mortification; but it is a strong motive for all that, and a worthy one. It makes an administrative officer cautious in action, and enables him to listen with sympathy to pleading for which a careless outsider might find no excuse.

Yet the chance is too small, and the risk is too great. The shock of adversity when the doors of the college close, the

immediate need of hard, low-paid work in a cold world where there is no success without industry, may be the one saving thing after the failure of the academic invitation to duty with no palpable relation of industry to success. Compulsory labor with a definite object may at length bring voluntary labor and that enjoyment of work without which nobody who is so fortunate as to work for his living through most of his waking hours can be efficient or happy; and exclusion from college is sometimes the awakening from dull and selfish immaturity into responsible manhood. No one is entitled to a college education who does not earn the right from day to day by strenuous or by enthusiastic life; college is for the ablest and the best: yet, as some fathers send their least efficient sons into the ministry, as some men who have failed in divers walks of life seek a refuge as teachers of literature, so, and with results almost as deplorable, some people send their boys to college because nobody

can see in those boys a single sign of usefulness.

Wise fathers and mothers, when they visit a college officer, are commonly concerned with their sons' courses of study; their mission is rarely sorrowful. The parents of troublesome students are not, as a rule, wise. Yet some fathers and mothers whose sons have gone wrong stand out clearly in my mind as almost everything that a parent should be, — asking no favors, seeing clearly and promptly the distinction between the honorable and the dishonorable, and the distinction between the honorable and the half honorable, holding the standard high for their sons and for themselves in every relation of life: women struggling in silent loyalty to free their children from the iniquity of the fathers, and men as tender as women and as true as truth itself. What they are to their sons we can only guess; to an administrative officer, they are "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

FROM
ROUTINE AND IDEALS

# THE MISTAKES OF COLLEGE LIFE

## A TALK TO BOYS ON THE POINT OF ENTERING COLLEGE

In a certain sense, college is the place for mistakes. In college a young man tests his strength, and, while testing it, is protected from the results of failure far more effectively than he will ever be protected afterward. The youth who is determined to succeed in public speaking may stand up again and again in a college debating club, may fail again and again, and through his failure may rise to success; whereas if he should put off his efforts until some political campaign had called him to the stump, no audience would listen to him, or even let him go

on. "The mistakes that make us men," says Dr. Lyman Abbott, "are better than the accuracies that keep us children." Yet even in college there are mistakes by which the career of a happy, well-meaning youth is suddenly darkened; and though he may learn out of the very bitterness of his experience, he is never quite the same again.

All boys with a fair chance in the world have at their best a common motive, — to be of some use, to lead active, efficient lives, to do something worth doing, and to do it well, to become men on whom people instinctively and not in vain rely. Men and women may be divided roughly into two classes, — those who are "there," and those who are "not there." The "not there" people may be clever, may be what is called "good company," may have, even after you know them pretty well, a good deal of personal charm; but once know them through and through, and you have no use for

them. The "there" people may be unpolished, unmagnetic, without social charm; but once understand that they are "there," and you get help and comfort from the mere knowledge that there are such people in the world. Every boy in his heart of hearts admires a man who is "there," and wishes to be like him; but not every boy (and here is the sad part of it) understands that to be "there" is the result of a long process, the result of training day by day and year by year, precisely as to be a sure man (I do not say a brilliant man) in the pitcher's box or behind the bat is the result of long training. A single decision or indecision, an act of a moment or a moment's failure to act, may turn a whole life awry; but the weakness of that moment is only the expression of a weakness which for months or for years has been undermining the character, or at best the result of a failure to train body, mind, and heart for the emergencies of life.

In this training we can learn, if we will, from other people's experience; and although boys are loath to accept anybody's experience but their own, and are not always wise enough to accept that, it is yet worth while to show them some dangers which other boys have met or have failed to meet, that they may not be taken unawares. A great man, almost too far above the temptations of the average boy to understand them, has condemned talking to boys and young men about temptation; he would fill their minds with good things: but there are no boys whose minds are so full of good things that a temptation cannot get in edgewise. An absorbing interest in a good something or a good somebody holds back and may finally banish the worst temptations; it is quite as important to interest boys in good things as to take away their interest in bad ones: but when all is said, the lightest hearted boy who comes to manhood must come

to it "through sorrows and through scars."

To many boys the beginning of college life is the first step into the world. Its dangers are much like those of other first steps into the world, yet with this difference: the college boy has the advantage of living where ideals are noble, and the disadvantage (if he is weak or immature) of living where he need not get heartily tired day after day in keeping long, inevitable hours of work. This disadvantage is indeed a privilege, but a privilege which like all privileges is bad unless accorded to a responsible being. To discipline one's self, to hold one's self responsible, is ever so much better than to be disciplined, to be held responsible by somebody else; but it is a task for a man. Naturally enough, then, the mistakes and the sins of college life are commonly rooted in boyish irresponsibility.

The average youth takes kindly to the

notion that in the first year or two at college he need not be bound by the ordinary restraints of law-abiding men and women. "Boys will be boys," even to the extent of sowing wild oats. Time enough to settle down by and by; meanwhile the world is ours. A year or so of lawlessness will be great fun, and will give us large experience; and even if we shock some good people, we are but doing the traditional thing. A youth who feels thus takes prompt offence if treated, as he says, "like a kid;" yet he may do things so low that any honest child would despise them. Nor is this true of one sex only. I have heard a married woman recount with satisfaction her two nights' work in stealing a sign when she was at college; and her father, a college man, listened with sympathetic joy. I have known a youth who held a large scholarship in money to steal, or — as he preferred to say — "pinch," an instrument worth several dollars from the lab-

oratory where he was trusted as he would have been trusted in a gentleman's parlor. I have even heard of students who bought signs, and hung them up in their rooms to get the reputation of stealing them. Surely there is nothing in college life to make crime a joke. A street "mucker" sneaks into a student's room and steals half a dozen neckties (for which the student has not paid), and nothing is too hard for him; a student steals a poor laundryman's sign for fun: may a gentleman do without censure what sends a "mucker" to jail? If the gentleman is locked up in the evening to be taken before the judge in the morning, his friends are eager to get him out. Yet in one night of ascetic meditation he may learn more than in his whole previous life of his relation to the rights of his fellow men. One of the first lessons in college life is an axiom: Crime is crime, and a thief is a thief, even at an institution of learning. The college thief

has, it is true, a different motive from his less favored brother; but is the motive better? Is there not at the root of it a misunderstanding of one man's relation to another, so selfish that, in those who ought to be the flower of American youth, it would be hardly conceivable if we did not see it with our own eyes? People sometimes wonder at the desire of towns to tax colleges, instead of helping them. A small number of students who steal signs, and refuse to pay bills unless the tradesman's manner pleases them, may well account for it all.

As there is nothing in college life to justify a thief, so there is nothing in it to justify a liar. College boys in their relation to one another are quite as truthful as other people; but some of them regard their dealings with college authorities as some men regard horse-trades. We know them capable of distinguishing truth from falsehood, since their

standard of integrity for their teachers is sensitively high. Their standard for themselves is part of that conceit, of that blind incapacity for the Golden Rule, which is often characteristic of early manhood. To this blindness most books about school and college life contribute. Even the healthier of these books stir the reader's sympathy in behalf of the gentlemanly, happy-go-lucky youth who pulls wool over the eyes of his teachers, and deepen the impression that college boys live in a fairyland of charming foolery, and are no more morally responsible than the gods of Olympus. Plainly such a theory of college life, even if no one holds to it long, nurses a selfishness and an insincerity which may outlast the theory that has nourished them. The man who has his themes written for him, or who cribs at examinations, or who excuses himself from college lectures because of "sickness" in order to rest after or before a

dance, may be clever and funny to read about; but his cleverness and "funniness" are not many degrees removed from those of the forger and the impostor, who may also be amusing in fiction.

Another bad thing in the substitution of excuses, even fairly honest excuses, for work is the weakening effect of it on everyday life. The work of the world is in large measure done by people whose heads and throats and stomachs do not feel just right, but who go about their daily duties, and in doing them forget their heads and throats and stomachs. He who is to be "there" as a man cannot afford to cosset himself as a boy. A well-known railroad man has remarked that he knows in his business two kinds of men: one, with a given piece of work to do before a given time, comes back at the appointed hour and says, "That job is done. I found unexpected difficulties, but it is done;" the other comes back

with "several excellent reasons" why the job is not done. "I have," says the railroad man, "no use for the second of these men." Nor has any business man use for him. The world is pretty cold toward chronic invalids and excuse-mongers. "If you are too sick to be here regularly," it says, "I am sorry for you, but I shall have to employ a healthier man." You will find, by the way, that it is easier to attend all your recitations than to attend half or three-quarters of them. Once open the question of not going, and you see "several excellent reasons" for staying at home. Routine, as all mature men know, steadies nerves, and, when used intelligently, adds contentment to life.

I have spoken of lying to college officers, and of excuses which, if I may use an undergraduate expression, "may be right, but are not stylish right." I come next to the question of responsibility to father and mother in matters of truth and

falsehood. One of the evils from vice of all sorts at college is the lying that results from it. Shame and fear, half disguised as a desire not to worry parents, cut off many a father and mother from knowing what they have a right to know, and what they, if confided in, might remedy. I have seldom seen a student in serious trouble who did not say — honestly enough, I presume — that he cared less for his own mortification than for his father's and mother's. As a rule, one of his parents is threatened with nervous prostration, or oppressed with business cares, or has a weak heart which, as the son argues, makes the receipt of bad news dangerous. Filial affection, which has been so dormant as to let the student do those things which would distress his parents most, awakes instantly at the thought that the parents must learn what he has done. The two severest rebukes of a certain gentle mother were: "You ought to have meant

*not* to," and "You ought to have been sorry beforehand."

Many a student, knowing that the college must communicate with his father, will not nerve himself to the duty and the filial kindness of telling his father first. I remember a boy who was to be suspended for drunkenness, and who was urged to break the news to his father before the official letter went.

"You don't know my father," he said. "My father is a very severe man, and I can't tell him."

"The only thing you can do for him," was the answer, "is to let him feel that you are able and willing to tell him first, — that you give him your confidence."

"Oh, you don't know him," said the boy again.

"Is there any 'out' about your father?"

"No" (indignantly)! "You would respect him and admire him; but he is a very severe man."

"Then he has a right to hear and

to hear first from you. You cannot help him more than by telling him, or hurt him more than by hiding the truth from him."

A day or two later the boy came back to the college office. "My father is a brick!" he said. In his confession he had learned for the first time how much his father cared for him.

A young man, intensely curious about the wickedness of life, is easily persuaded that the first business of a college student is "to know life," — that is, to know the worst things in it; and, in the pursuit of wisdom, he sets out in the evening, with others, merely to *see* the vice of a great city. He calls at a house where he meets bad men and bad women, and eats and drinks with them. What he eats and drinks he does not know; but in the morning he is still there, with a life stain upon him, and needing more than ever before to confide in father or mother or in some good physician. Yet the people

who can help him most, the people also in whom he must confide or be false to them, are the very people he avoids.

Again, it is hard to prove by cold logic that gambling is wrong. A young man says to himself, "If I wish to spend a dollar in this form of amusement, why should I not? I know perfectly well what I am about I am playing *with* money not playing *for* it. In some countries — in England, for example—clergymen, and good people generally, play whist with shilling stakes, and would not think of playing it without." So of vice he says, "No man knows human nature until he has seen the dark side. I shall be a broader man if I know these things; and some physicians recommend the practice of them in moderation." When we say, "Lead us not into temptation," we forget that one of the worst temptations in the world is the temptation to be led into temptation, — the temptation to gratify vulgar curiosity, and to see on what thin ice we

can walk. No man is safe; no man can tell what he shall do, or what others will do to him, if he once enters a gambling house or a brothel. The history of every city, and the history of every college, will prove what I say. There is no wisdom in looking at such places, — nothing but greenness and folly. The difficulty with gambling is, as some one has said, that "it eats the heart out of a man," — that imperceptibly the playing *with* slips into the playing *for*, until without gambling life seems tame: and the difficulty with vice is that it involves physical danger of the most revolting kind; that it kills self-respect; that it brings with it either shamelessness or a miserable dishonesty for decency's sake; and that it is a breach of trust to those who are, or who are to be, the nearest and the dearest, — a breach of trust to father and mother, and to the wife and children, who may seem remote and unreal, but who to most young men are close at hand. By the

time a boy goes to college, he may well feel responsibility to the girl whom some day he will respect and love, and who, he hopes, will respect and love him. A boy's or man's sense of fair play should show him that it is effrontery in a man who has been guilty of vice with women to ask for a pure girl's love. The time is only too likely to come when a young fellow who has yielded to the tremendous sudden temptation that is thrown at him in college and in the world, will face the bitter question, "Can I tell the truth about myself to the girl I love? If I tell it, I may justly lose her; if I do not tell it, my whole life may be a frightened lie."

> "Who is the Happy Husband? He
> Who, scanning his unwedded life,
> Thanks Heaven, with a conscience free,
> 'T was faithful to his future wife."

Not merely the curiosity which listens to false arguments about life and wisdom, but the awful loneliness of a boy far from home, may lead to vice and misery. The

boy who is used to girls at home, and who knows in his new surroundings no such girls as he knew at home, no such girls as his sisters' friends, is only too likely to scrape an easy acquaintance with some of those inferior girls by whom every student is seen in a kind of glamour, and to whom acquaintance with students is the chief excitement of life. With little education, much giddy vanity, and no refinement, these girls may yet possess a sort of cheap attractiveness. They are, besides, easy to get acquainted with, easy to be familiar with, and interesting simply because they are girls — for the time being, the only accessible girls. I need not dwell on the embarrassment, the sorrow, and even the crime, in which such friendships may end; but I may emphasize the responsibility of every man, young or old, towards every woman. "Every free and generous spirit," said Milton, "ought to be born a knight." It is the part of a man to protect these

girls against themselves. If they know no better than to hint to a student that they should like to see his room some evening, he knows better than to take the hint, — better than to suffer them through him to do what, though it may not stain their character, may yet destroy their good name. No girls stand more in need of chivalry than these vain girls, not yet bad, who flutter about the precincts of a college.

Students know what responsibility means; but their views of it are distorted. They demand it of their elders; in certain parts of athletics they demand it of themselves. Which is the worse breach of faith, to sit up a quarter of an hour later than your athletic trainer allows, or to betray the trust that father and mother have put in you, to gamble away or to spend on low women the money sent you for your term-bill, and to cover all with a lie?

It may be from a dim notion of these

eccentricities in undergraduate judgment that many boys cultivate irresponsibility with a view to social success. Social ambition is the strongest power in many a student's college life, a power compared with which all the rules and all the threats of the Faculty, who blindly ignore it, are impotent, a power that robs boys of their independence, leading them to do things foolish or worse and thereby to defeat their own end. For in the long run, — in the later years of the college course, — the "not there" and the "there" can be clearly distinguished. A student may be poor, he may not play poker, he may not drink, he may be free from all vice, he may not even smoke; and yet, if his virtue is not showy, he will be popular — provided he "does something for his class." "He is a bully fellow," the students say. "He is in training all the time."

I say little of responsibility to younger students. An older student who misleads a younger gets just about the name he

deserves. Even the Sophomore who seriously hazes a Freshman is now in the better colleges recognized as a coward. Cowardice once recognized, cannot long prevail; yet there was a time when it took a deal of courage for a few young men in one of our great colleges to stop an outbreak of hazing. It took a deal of courage; but they did it. After all, a student admires nothing so much as "sand." What he needs is to see that "sand" belongs not merely in war and athletics, but in everyday life, and that in everyday life "sand" may be accumulated. A Harvard student, it is said, was nearly dressed one morning and was choosing a necktie, when his door, which with the carelessness of youth he had left unlocked, suddenly opened. A woman entered, closed the door behind her, put her back to it, and said, "I want fifty dollars. If you don't give it to me, I shall scream." The young man, still examining his neckties, quietly replied,

"You 'd better holler;" and the woman went out. Had he given her money, had he even paid serious attention to her threat, he might have been in her power for life; but his coolness saved him. Another undergraduate, who before coming to college had worked as an engineer, and who was a few years older than most of his class, went one evening to an officer of the college who knew something of him, and said, "I hardly know just how I ought to speak to you; but in my building there is a Freshman who is going to pieces, and a Senior who is largely responsible for it." He then told what he had seen, and gave the names of both men. "If I look this up," said the college officer, "are you willing to appear in it? Are you willing to have your name known?" "I 'd rather not be 'queered,'" he answered; "but if it is necessary to be 'queered,' I will be." All this happened in a college which employs no spies and discourages tale-

bearing. For anything the student knew, the officer himself might think him a malicious informer. The "sand" in the hero of the first of these little stories any boy would see. To see the "sand" in the hero of the second takes some experience; but "sand," and "sand" of the finest quality, was there. This man's notion of the responsibility of older students to younger ones had in it something positive. "You have no idea," said a senator to Father Taylor, the sailor preacher, who had rebuked him for his vote, "You have no idea what the outside pressure was." "Outside pressure, Mr. Senator! Outside pressure! Where were your inside braces?" To run the risk of being thought a common informer when you are not, and to run it because you cannot let a man go under without trying to pull him out, requires such inside braces as few undergraduates possess.

Let me say, however, that there is no

better hope for Harvard College than in the readiness of the strong to help the weak. A youth is summoned to the college office, behindhand in his work, and bad in his way of living. The Faculty has done its best for him, and to no purpose. A student of acknowledged standing in athletics and in personal character appears at the office, and says, "I should like to see whether I can make that man work and keep him straight." This, or something like this, occurs so often that it is an important part of the college life. Moreover, when the strong man comes, he does not come with the foolish notion that he shall help the weak man in the eyes of the college office by pretending that he is not weak. He takes the case as it stands, knowing that his own purpose and that of the college office are one and the same, — to keep the student, if he can be made into a man, and otherwise in all kindness to send him home.

One more responsibility needs mentioning here, — responsibility to our work. In college, it is said, a man of fair capacity may do well one thing beside his college work, and one thing only. Those of us who are so fortunate as to earn our own living must spend most of our waking hours in work. It follows that we must learn to enjoy work or be unhappy. Now we learn to enjoy work by working; to get interested in any task by doing it with all our strength. This is the first lesson of scholarship: without it we cannot be scholars; and only by courtesy can we be called students. This is the first lesson of happy activity in life. In athletics, in music, in study, in business, we "train" ourselves toward the free exercise of our best powers, toward the joy that comes of mastery. A college oarsman once declared that after a season on the slides he felt able to undertake anything. The intellectual interests of a modern university

are bewildering and intense. Among them every intelligent youth can find something worthy of his best labors, something in which his best labors will yield enjoyment beyond price. Right-minded students see the noble opportunity in a college life; and there is no sadder sight than the blindness of those who do not see it until it is lost forever.

While speaking of the intellectual side of college life, I may warn students against becoming specialists too early. Every study has some connection with every other and gets some light from it; but a specialty, seriously undertaken, compels a close study of itself, and may leave little time for other study. An unenlightened specialist is a narrow being; and he who becomes an exclusive specialist before he has been in college two years is usually unenlightened. Even after the choice of a specialty, a student, like a professional man, may wisely

reserve one corner of his mind for something totally different from his specialty, and may find in that little corner a relief which makes him a better specialist. It is good for a man buried in a chemical laboratory to take a course in English poetry; it is good for a man steeped in literature to have a mild infusion of chemistry.

The lazy student (if I may return to him now) finds the thread of his study broken by his frequent absences from the lecture room, and finds the lecture hour a long, dull period of hard seats and wandering thoughts. Note-taking would shorten the hour, soften the seats, simplify the subject, and make the whole situation vastly more interesting. No matter if some clever students are willing to sell him notes, and he has no scruples about buying them ; the mere process of note-taking, apart from the education and training in it, gives him something to do in the lecture room, makes it im-

possible for him not to know something of the subject, and shortens his period of cramming for examination. I believe, further, that a student's happiness is increased by a time-table of regular hours for work in each study. The preparation of theses, and the necessity of using library books when other people are not using them, make it hard now and then to follow a time-table strictly ; but in general such a table is a wonderful saver of time. If a student leaves one lecture room at ten and goes to another at twelve and has no idea what he wishes to do between ten and twelve, he is likely to do nothing. Even if he has determined to study, he loses time in getting under way — in deciding what to study. Work with a time-table tends to promptness in transition ; and when the time-table for the day is carried out, the free hours are truly free, a time of clear and well-earned recreation. At school the morning routine is prescribed by the teacher. At col-

lege, where it should be prescribed by the student, it frequently breaks down. A man's freedom, as viewed with a boy's eyes, is liberty to waste time: it is the luxury of spending the best morning hours in a billiard room, or loafing in a classmate's "study;" the joy of hearing the bell ring and ring for *you*, while you sit high above the slaves of toil and puff the smoke of cigarettes with the superb indifference of a small cloud-compelling Zeus. The peculiar evil in cigarettes I leave for scientific men to explain; I know merely that among college students the excessive cigarette smokers are recognized even by other smokers as representing the feeblest form of intellectual and moral life. At their worst they have no backbone; they cannot tell (and possibly cannot see) the truth; and they loaf. Senator Hoar, in an address to Harvard students, remarked that in his judgment the men who succeed best in life are the men who have made the best

use of the odd moments at college, and that, contrary to the general opinion, it is worse to loaf in college than to loaf in a professional school. The young lawyer, he observed, who has neglected the law may make up his deficiencies in the early years of his practice; "he will have plenty of time then:" but there is no recovery of the years thrown away at college.

Once more, if we could only teach by the experience of others, we should save untold misery. I met not long since a young business man who had been for four years on and off probation in Harvard College and had not yet received his degree. In college he had seemed dull. He probably thought he worked, because his life was broken into, more or less, by college exercises, which he attended with some regularity. Now he is really working, with no time to make up college deficiencies, ready to admit that in college he hardly knew the meaning of work,

and to say simply and spontaneously, "I made a fool of myself in college." Another student, who did nothing in his studies, who spent four or five thousand dollars a year, and who constantly hired tutors to do his thinking, was finally expelled because he got a substitute to write an examination for him. Home trouble followed college trouble; he was thrown on himself and into the cold world; and he became a man. From scrubbing street cars, he was promoted to running them; from running them to holding a place of trust with men to do his orders. "Every day," he said, "I feel the need of what I threw away at college. Do you think if I came back I should need any more tutors? I'd go through quicker than anything, with nobody to help me. What sent me away was the one dishonest thing in my life." The dishonest thing came about through loafing.

Even socially, as I have intimated, the

loafer seldom or never wins the highest college success. Graduating classes bestow their honors on men who have "done something," — athletics, college journalism, debating, if you will, not necessarily hard study in the college course, but hard and devoted work in something, and work with an unselfish desire to help the college and the class. At Harvard College in the class of 1899 all three marshals graduated with distinction in their studies. By the beginning of the Senior year the class knows the men to be relied on, the men who are "there," and knows that they are men of active life.

I have spoken earlier of a student's responsibility to some unknown girl who is to be his wife. What is his responsibility to a known girl with whom in college days he falls in love? Just as college Faculties are blind to the effect of social ambition in students, they are blind to the effect of sweethearts. I

do not quite know what they could do if their eyes were opened; for college rules, happily, must be independent of sweethearts. I mean merely that scores of cases in which students break rules, "cut" lectures, disappear for a day or two without permission, and do other things that look rebellious, are readily accounted for by the disquieting influence of girls. What students do (or don't) when they are in love is a pretty good test of their character. One drops his work altogether, and devotes what time he cannot spend with the girl to meditating upon her. He can think of nothing else; and accordingly for her sake he becomes useless. Another sets his teeth, and works hard. "She is," he says naturally enough, "infinitely above me. How She ever can care for me, I do not know; whether She ever will, I do not know; but I will be what I can and do what I can. I will do whatever I do as if I were doing it for Her.

I *am* doing it for Her. If I succeed, it will be through Her; if my success pleases Her, I shall be repaid."

No girl worth having will think better of a man for shirking his plain duty in order to hang about her. No girl likes a "quitter;" and most girls agree with the heroine of Mr. Kipling's beautiful story, "William the Conqueror," when she says, "I like men who do things." The story shows with profound and exquisite truth how two persons of strong character may grow into each other's love and into an understanding of it by doing their separate duties. To go on, girl or no girl, without excuses small or great; to do the appointed task and to do it cheerfully amid all distractions, all sorrows, all heartaches; to make routine (not blind but enlightened routine) your friend — thus it is that by and by when you meet the hard blows of the world you can

"Go labor on; spend and be spent."

Thus it is that you find the strength which is born of trained capacity for interest in daily duty.

On the banks of the Connecticut is a school without a loafer in it. The scholars are needy for the most part, and so grimly in earnest that only a printed regulation restrains them from getting up "before 5 A. M." without permission. I am far from recommending study before breakfast, or loss of the night's sleep; but I admire the whole-hearted energy with which these boys and grown men seize the opportunity of their lives. I admire the same energy in athletics, if a student will only remember that his athletics are for his college, not his college for his athletics.

One more caution for college life and for after life. Do not let your ideals get shopworn. Keep the glory of your youth. A man with no visions, be he young or old, is a poor thing. There is no place like a college for visions and ideals; and

it is through our visions, through our ideals, that we keep high our standard of character and life. No man's character is fixed; and no responsible man is overconfident of his own. It is the part of every boy when he arrives at manhood to recognize as one of his greatest dangers the fading of the vision, and to set himself against this danger with all his might. It is only the man with ideals who is founded on a rock, and resists the rains and the floods.

A vigorous young fellow, fresh from college, went into a business house at four dollars a week, and rapidly rose to a well-paid and responsible position. One day he received from a member of the firm an order to do something that he thought dishonorable. He showed the order to the member of the firm whom he knew best, and asked him what he thought of it.

"Come and dine with me," said his patron, "and we will talk it over."

"Excuse me," said the young man. "Any other day I should be glad to dine with you; but this matter is business."

"Look!" said the other. "Business is war; and if you do not do these things in business, you can't live."

"I don't believe it," said the young man. "If I did, I should n't be here. I leave your employ Saturday night;" — and, to the amazement of the firm, he left it forever.

"And virtue's whole sum is but know and dare,"

said a great poet in one of his greatest moments. It takes a man with ideals to begin all over again, abandoning the kind of work in which he has won conspicuous success, and abandoning it because he finds that its methods, though accepted by business men generally, are for him dishonorable.

In and out of college the man with ideals helps, so far as in him lies, his

college and his country. It is hard for a boy to understand that in life, whatever he does, he helps to make or mar the name of his college. I have said "in life" — I may say also "in death." Not long since, I saw a Harvard Senior on what proved to be his death-bed. The people at the hospital declared that they had never seen such pain borne with such fortitude, — "and," said the Medical Visitor of the University, "he was through it all such a gentleman." A day or two before his death an attendant asked him whether he felt some local pain. "I did not," said he, "until you gave me that medicine." Then instantly he added, miserably weak and suffering as he was, "I beg your pardon. You know and I don't. It may be the medicine had nothing to do with my pain." I believe no man or woman in the ward saw that boy die without seeing also a new meaning and a new beauty in the college whose name he bore. As has often been said, the youth

who loves his Alma Mater will always ask, not "What can she do for me?" but "What can I do for her?"

Responsibility is — first, last, and always — the burden of my song, a student's responsibility to home, to fellow students, to school, to college, and (let me add once more) to the girl whom he will ask some day to be his wife. "Moral taste," as Miss Austen calls it, is nothing without moral force. "If," said a college President to a Freshman class, "you so live that in a few years you will be a fit companion for an intellectual, high-minded, pure-hearted woman, you will not go far wrong." Keep her in mind always, or, if you are not imaginative enough for that, remember that the lines

> "No spring nor summer's beauty hath such grace
> As I have seen in one autumnal face"

were written of a good man's mother.

FROM
PRINCIPLES OF
PSYCHOLOGY

# HABIT

This is a part of the chapter on Habit from the "Principles of Psychology" by William James. The chapter is a remarkable scientific treatise as well as a literary classic. Unfortunately it is too long to be reprinted in full here. After dealing with the physiological aspects of the subject, Professor James concludes the essays with this passage.

THIS brings us by a very natural transition to the *ethical implications of the law of habit.* They are numerous and momentous. Dr. Carpenter, from whose "Mental Physiology" we have quoted, has so prominently enforced the principle that our organs grow to the way in which they have been exercised, and dwelt upon its consequences, that his book almost deserves to be called a work of edification, on this account alone. We need make no apology, then,

for tracing a few of these consequences ourselves:

"Habit a second nature! Habit is ten times nature," the Duke of Wellington is said to have exclaimed; and the degree to which this is true no one can probably appreciate as well as one who is a veteran soldier himself. The daily drill and the years of discipline end by fashioning a man completely over again, as to most of the possibilities of his conduct.

"There is a story, which is credible enough, though it may not be true, of a practical joker, who, seeing a discharged veteran carrying home his dinner, suddenly called out, 'Attention!' whereupon the man instantly brought his hands down, and lost his mutton and potatoes in the gutter. The drill had been thorough, and its effects had become embodied in the man's nervous structure." [1]

[1] Huxley's *Elementary Lessons in Physiology*, lesson XII.

Riderless cavalry-horses, at many a battle, have been seen to come together and go through their customary evolutions at the sound of the bugle-call. Most trained domestic animals, dogs and oxen, and omnibus- and car-horses seem to be machines almost pure and simple, undoubtingly, unhesitatingly doing from minute to minute the duties they have been taught, and giving no sign that the possibility of an alternative ever suggests itself to their mind. Men grown old in prison have asked to be readmitted after being once set free. In a railroad accident to a travelling menagerie in the United States some time in 1884, a tiger, whose cage had broken open, is said to have emerged, but presently crept back again, as if too much bewildered by his new responsibilities, so that he was without difficulty secured.

Habit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conserva-

tive agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor. It alone prevents the hardest and most repulsive walks of life from being deserted by those brought up to tread therein. It keeps the fisherman and the deck-hand at sea through the winter; it holds the miner in his darkness, and nails the countryman to his log-cabin and his lonely farm through all the months of snow; it protects us from invasion by the natives of the desert and the frozen zone. It dooms us all to fight out the battle of life upon the lines of our nurture or our early choice, and to make the best of a pursuit that disagrees, because there is no other for which we are fitted, and it is too late to begin again. It keeps different social strata from mixing. Already at the age of twenty-five you see the professional mannerism settling down on the young commercial

traveller, on the young doctor, on the young minister, on the young counsellor-at-law. You see the little lines of cleavage running through the character, the tricks of thought, the prejudices, the ways of the "shop," in a word, from which the man can by-and-by no more escape than his coat-sleeve can suddenly fall into a new set of folds. On the whole, it is best he should not escape. It is well for the world that in most of us, by the age of thirty, the character has set like plaster, and will never soften again.

If the period between twenty and thirty is the critical one in the formation of intellectual and professional habits, the period below twenty is more important still for the fixing of *personal* habits, properly so called, such as vocalization and pronunciation, gesture, motion, and address. Hardly ever is a language learned after twenty spoken without a foreign accent; hardly ever can a

youth transferred to the society of his betters unlearn the nasality and other vices of speech bred in him by the associations of his growing years. Hardly ever, indeed, no matter how much money there be in his pocket, can he even learn to *dress* like a gentleman-born. The merchants offer their wares as eagerly to him as to the veriest "swell," but he simply *cannot* buy the right things. An invisible law, as strong as gravitation, keeps him within his orbit, arrayed this year as he was the last; and how his better-bred acquaintances contrive to get the things they wear will be for him a mystery till his dying day.

The great thing, then, in all education, is to *make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy.* It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund. *For this we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can,* and guard

against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague. The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their own proper work. There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work, are subjects of express volitional deliberation. Full half the time of such a man goes to the deciding, or regretting, of matters which ought to be so ingrained in him as practically not to exist for his consciousness at all. If there be such daily duties not yet ingrained in any one of my readers, let him begin this very hour to set the matter right.

In Professor Bain's chapter on "The

Moral Habits" there are some admirable practical remarks laid down. Two great maxims emerge from his treatment. The first is that in the acquisition of a new habit, or the leaving off of an old one, we must take care to *launch ourselves with as strong and decided an initiative as possible.* Accumulate all the possible circumstances which shall reinforce the right motives; put yourself assiduously in conditions that encourage the new way; make engagements incompatible with the old; take a public pledge, if the case allows; in short, envelop your resolution with every aid you know. This will give your new beginning such a momentum that the temptation to break down will not occur as soon as it otherwise might; and every day during which a breakdown is postponed adds to the chances of its not occurring at all.

The second maxim is: *Never suffer an exception to occur till the new habit is se-*

*curely rooted in your life.* Each lapse is like the letting fall of a ball of string which one is carefully winding up; a single slip undoes more than a great many turns will wind again. *Continuity* of training is the great means of making the nervous system act infallibly right. As Professor Bain says:

"The peculiarity of the moral habits, contradistinguishing them from the intellectual acquisitions, is the presence of two hostile powers, one to be gradually raised into the ascendant over the other. It is necessary, above all things, in such a situation,never to lose a battle. Every gain on the wrong side undoes the effect of many conquests on the right. The essential precaution, therefore, is so to regulate the two opposing powers that the one may have a series of uninterrupted successes, until repetition has fortified it to such a degree as to enable it to cope with the opposition, under any circumstances. This is the theoretically best career of mental progress."

The need of securing success at the *outset* is imperative. Failure at first is apt to dampen the energy of all future attempts, whereas past experience of success nerves one to future vigor. Goethe says to a man who consulted him about an enterprise but mistrusted his own powers: "Ach! you need only blow on your hands!" And the remark illustrates the effect on Goethe's spirits of his own habitually successful career. Professor Baumann, from whom I borrow the anecdote,[1] says that the collapse of barbarian nations when Europeans come among them is due to their despair of ever succeeding as the newcomers do in the larger tasks of life. Old ways are broken and new ones not formed. The question of "tapering-off," in abandoning such habits as drink and opium-indulgence, comes in here, and is a question about which experts differ within

[1] See the admirable passage about success at the outset, in his *Handbuch der Moral* (1878), pp. 38–43.

certain limits, and in regard to what may be best for an individual case. In the main, however, all expert opinion would agree that abrupt acquisition of the new habit is the best way, *if there be a real possibility of carrying it out.* We must be careful not to give the will so stiff a task as to insure its defeat at the very outset; but, *provided one can stand it*, a sharp period of suffering, and then a free time, is the best thing to aim at, whether in giving up a habit like that of opium, or in simply changing one's hours of rising or of work. It is surprising how soon a desire will die of inanition if it be *never* fed.

"One must first learn, unmoved, looking neither to the right nor left, to walk firmly on the straight and narrow path, before one can begin 'to make one's self over again.' He who every day makes a fresh resolve is like one who, arriving at the edge of the ditch he is to leap, forever stops and returns for a fresh run. Without *unbroken* advance

there is no such thing as *accumulation* of the ethical forces possible, and to make this possible, and to exercise us and habituate us in it, is the sovereign blessing of regular *work*."[1]

A third maxim may be added to the preceding pair: *Seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make, and on every emotional prompting you may experience in the direction of the habits you aspire to gain.* It is not in the moment of their forming, but in the moment of their producing *motor effects*, that resolves and aspirations communicate the new "set" to the brain. As the author last quoted remarks:

"The actual presence of the practical opportunity alone furnishes the fulcrum upon which the lever can rest, by means of which the moral will may multiply its strength, and raise itself aloft. He who has no solid ground to press against will never get beyond the stage of empty gesture-making."

[1] J. Bahnsen: *Beiträge zu Charakterologie* (1867), vol. I, p. 209.

No matter how full a reservoir of *maxims* one may possess and no matter how good one's *sentiments* may be, if one have not taken advantage of every concrete opportunity to *act* one's character may remain entirely unaffected for the better. With mere good intentions, hell is proverbially paved. And this is an obvious consequence of the principles we have laid down. A "character," as J. S. Mill says, "is a completely fashioned will"; and a will, in the sense in which he means it, is an aggregate of tendencies to act in a firm and prompt and definite way upon all the principal emergencies of life. A tendency to act only becomes effectively ingrained in us in proportion to the uninterrupted frequency with which the actions actually occur, and the brain "grows" to their use. Every time a resolve or a fine glow of feeling evaporates without bearing practical fruit is worse than a chance lost; it works so as positively to hinder

future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge. There is no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer, who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a manly concrete deed. Rousseau, inflaming all the mothers of France, by his eloquence, to follow Nature and nurse their babies themselves, while he sends his own children to the foundling hospital, is the classical example of what I mean. But every one of us in his measure, whenever, after glowing for an abstractly formulated Good, he practically ignores some actual case, among the squalid "other particulars" of which that same Good lurks disguised, treads straight on Rousseau's path. All Goods are disguised by the vulgarity of their concomitants, in this work-a-day world; but woe to him who can only recognize them when he thinks them in their pure

and abstract form! The habit of excessive novel-reading and theatre-going will produce true monsters in this line. The weeping of a Russian lady over the fictitious personages in the play, while her coachman is freezing to death on the seat outside, is the sort of thing that everywhere happens on a less glaring scale. Even the habit of excessive indulgence in music, for those who are neither performers themselves nor musically gifted enough to take it in a purely intellectual way, has probably a relaxing effect upon the character. One becomes filled with emotions which habitually pass without prompting to any deed, and so the inertly sentimental condition is kept up. The remedy would be, never to suffer one's self to have an emotion at a concert, without expressing it afterward in *some* active way.[1]

[1] See for remarks on this subject a readable article by Miss V. Scudder on "Musical Devotees and Morals," in the *Andover Review* for January, 1887.

Let the expression be the least thing in the world — speaking genially to one's aunt, or giving up one's seat in a horse-car, if nothing more heroic offers — but let it not fail to take place.

These latter cases make us aware that it is not simply *particular lines* of discharge, but also *general forms* of discharge, that seem to be grooved out by habit in the brain. Just as, if we let our emotions evaporate, they get into a way of evaporating; so there is reason to suppose that if we often flinch from making an effort, before we know it the effort-making capacity will be gone; and that, if we suffer the wandering of our attention, presently it will wander all the time. Attention and effort are, as we shall see later, but two names for the same psychic fact. To what brain-processes they correspond we do not know. The strongest reason for believing that they do depend on brain-processes at all, and are not pure acts of

the spirit, is just this fact, that they seem in some degree subject to the law of habit, which is a material law. As a final practical maxim, relative to these habits of the will, we may, then, offer something like this: *Keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day.* That is, be systematically ascetic or heroic in little unnecessary points, do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test. Asceticism of this sort is like the insurance which a man pays on his house and goods. The tax does him no good at the time, and possibly may never bring him a return. But if the fire *does* come, his having paid it will be his salvation from ruin. So with the man who has daily inured himself to habits of concentrated attention, energetic volition, and self-denial in unneces-

sary things. He will stand like a tower when everything rocks around him, and when his softer fellow-mortals are winnowed like chaff in the blast.

The physiological study of mental conditions is thus the most powerful ally of hortatory ethics. The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way. Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its never so little scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying, "I won't count this time!" Well! he may not count it, and a kind Heaven may not count it;

but it is being counted none the less. Down among his nerve-cells and fibres the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do, is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one. As we become permanent drunkards by so many separate drinks, so we become saints in the moral, and authorities and experts in the practical and scientific spheres, by so many separate acts and hours of work. Let no youth have any anxiety about the upshot of his education, whatever the line of it may be. If he keep faithfully busy each hour of the working-day, he may safely leave the final result to itself. He can with perfect certainty count on waking up some fine morning, to find himself one of the competent ones of his generation, in whatever pursuit he may have singled out. Silently, between all the

details of his business, the *power of judging* in all that class of matter will have built itself up within him as a possession that will never pass away. Young people should know this truth in advance. The ignorance of it has probably engendered more discouragement and faint-heartedness in youths embarking on arduous careers than all other causes put together.

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